

# american archaeology

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## Clovis Point Found In 19th-Century Cemetery

*Virginia excavation uncovers ancient artifact.*

Archaeologists conducting test excavations at a historical cemetery in Alexandria, Virginia, have discovered a Clovis point, the oldest archaeological item discovered in the city. Researchers with Alexandria Archaeology, the city's archaeology department, were excavating Freedmen's Cemetery, a graveyard where, according to historical documents, more than 1,800 blacks who fled the South during the Civil War were buried.

"We don't know at this point if it's an isolated find," said Francine Bromberg, the preservation archaeologist at Alexandria Archaeology and coprincipal investigator of the excavation. "We're still in the very early stages of identifying and cataloguing artifacts." A lithics specialist identified the point based on its style. During excavations in 1998 to 2000, the site yielded other prehistoric evidence such as tool debitage dating as far back as the Middle Archaic period. "At this point we don't know how much of the site we're going to dig," she said.

The initial excavation of the cemetery resulted from construction work on the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, which spans the Potomac River between Alexandria and Washington, D.C. Though portions of the cemetery were buried beneath a gas station and an office building, city officials knew of its existence through historical documents, and they realized the construction project could affect the site. Consequently they conducted test excavations between 1998 and 2000 to identify the



Archaeologists scrape a trench floor to delineate grave shafts. The grave shafts are identified by changes in the color and texture of the soil.

locations of burials. The excavations identified 78 burials, and excavations in 2004 revealed 45 more.

At the time of the earlier excavations, Freedmen's Cemetery was located on both public and private land. Earlier this year the City of Alexandria purchased the land with the idea of building a memorial park to pay tribute to the people buried there. The city removed the gas station and the office building in May of this year to make room for the park. Archaeologists are now working to identify the locations of grave shafts so that the burials won't be disturbed when the memorial park is built.

Freedmen's Cemetery was established in 1864. As the Union Army invaded the South, thousands of slaves,

who were referred to as "contraband," fled to Alexandria, which was then under Union control. "They arrived in Alexandria destitute and malnourished," Bromberg said. "They were fed and clothed at government expense," and they worked various jobs in return. The government kept records of the people who died at that time, including their names, and in some cases the causes of their deaths. The cemetery is "a nationally significant site," Bromberg said, and finding the Clovis point has made it all the more so.

Because of time and money constraints, the archaeologists may not conduct further excavations of the prehistoric portion of the site.

—Michael Bawaya